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Regrettably, there are no completely reliable criteria for determining whether an association is causal or not. Causal inference is usually tentative and judgements must be made on the basis of the available evidence: uncertainty always remains. Evidence is often conflicting and due weight must be given to the different types when decisions are being made. In judging the different aspects of causation referred to above, the correct temporal relationship is essential; once that has been established, the greatest weight may be given to plausibility, consistency and the dose-response relationship. The likelihood of a causal association is heightened when many different types of evidence lead to the same conclusion. Evidence from well-designed studies is particularly important, especially if they are conducted in a variety of locations.

Beaglehole, R., Bonita, R., Kjellstrom, T. *Basic epidemiology*. World Health Organization, Geneva, 1993.

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